

## Essex ICC 1<sup>st</sup> Team Report 2013

What a difference a year makes... Essex First Team Report 2012-2013 Season

After finishing as the worst team in last season's Premier division, we set off up to Stoke for the first weekend not really knowing what was in store. Our men were picked from the same crop as the previous year with a place higher up the rankings for Ben Barber and what a cracking season it turned out to be for our county champion. However my spirits were buoyed by the return to the team of both Sarah Walker and Caroline Westley who missed virtually all of last season due to injuries and other playing commitments. We also had the introduction of a new face to the team, Tanapat Pisitpong, who for the rest of this report shall be known as Ging.

The first day saw us take on the two non-English teams in the league and what a start it was! 7-3 against the Northern Irish and one better in the afternoon against the Welsh. We caught both teams not at full strength but strong performances from our team meant that only one of the five games we lost that day saw us beaten without it going to three ends. The highlight of the Saturday was a tight, very tense win for our second men's doubles pair of Andy Brunning and the aforementioned county champ Ben Barber. Saturday was rounded off in traditional fashion with a smashing team meal, literally speaking of course with not one but two wine glasses coming to their demise at the hand of one of our female players, of course it would be wrong to mention names but hey the captains got to have some artistic license, so cheers to the wrecker Lynne Swan.

On Sunday we took on Surrey's second team and had an equally impressive victory. After a tough loss at first mixed and a very impressive performance from one of Surrey's young singles players, we managed another 8-2 win giving us 23 points out of a possible 30 and a 5 point lead as we drove back home down the M1.

The December weekend saw us start against local rivals Middlesex. I am very happy to say we had a solid victory with our singles players claiming all four of the points up for grabs. Our usually pretty reliable men's doubles pairs lost out in three in both of the games, but the girls made up for the guys winning both. Then the mixed points were shared with a great third set victory for last minute super sub Daniel Chipperfield and Karina Bye. So with seven points in the bag from last season's other premierships side I was a very happy captain especially as we were without our star man Joel Gayle, who was plying his trade abroad in Switzerland and also the fact that Sarah Walker now had to make a mad dash for the airport to jet off on international duties.

Next up was Derbyshire, a team that fields a number of well-known names such as Kellogg and Roebuck. Another great start saw us continue the so far maintained moment leading after the singles 4-0. However now it was time for those big names to enter the stage and enforce their dominance. We managed to pick up only one other game in the match which was the second ladies doubles by Karina Bye and Tracey Hutchinson. I'm afraid I cannot report on the activities of the team that evening as usual, as unfortunately I went straight to bed at the hotel with a 24hr stomach bug, but I am sure our guys performed just as well off court as on, as is our way!

The next day was our worst of the season recording our only loss at the hands of the weekend's local team Buckinghamshire. We started well again leading 3-1 after the singles with a good win for Eddie Chow but managed only one more game to lose 4-6. It should be mentioned however that we were

only 5 points away from reversing the score line with tough 21-17 and 21-19 third set losses in the second ladies doubles and mixed by Lynne Swan in each partnered by Tracey Hutchinson and Daniel Chipperfield respectively. Our second weekend at Milton Keynes did not yield quite as many points but we did manage to hold our position 5 points clear at the top of the table, so we were in a great position to move in to the final weekend and push on for a trip back to the top flight.

And so we finished the season at Guildford's Surrey Sports Park. With Joel back and a 5 point cushion I was confident but we had two tough teams to play on the Saturday in Yorkshire 2 and Sussex. A 7-3 win against our old northern rivals put a very satisfying smile on my face. Once again we took all 4 singles games and shared the honours in the men's, ladies and mixed doubles. What came next was quite unexpected and changed the satisfaction I felt to jubilation. Our start of 4-0 came almost as expected by now, although Joel had a very hard fought match against Sussex's top man. We then picked up full points from both men's and ladies doubles, again with tough, ground out wins for the men. So it was on, Could we get a whitewash? It was down to Andy Brunning/Lynne Swan and Ben Barber/Karina Bye to do the business and did they ever. Convincing wins for both pairs meant that we had done it the only 10-0 of the season by any team. The beauty of this victory meant that Essex were now 11 points clear of second place and were Champions!!!

A great night followed with some good food and a lot of fun. Marred only slightly by the brief loss of property by our returning heroine Caroline Westley but with the bag returned by the night club security we could continue our celebrations in style. Those of you that know me will I'm sure expect my behaviour to have been reserved and quiet, certainly not at all rubbing our victory in to the noses of our friends and fellow competitors from the other teams in the division!!! The team had a great night and still had enough left in the tank for another victory on the Sunday against Leicestershire.

The previous night's partying had not affected the team too much and a 9-1 victory saw us win by an astonishing 14 points from Buckinghamshire. So it will be us and them back in the top flight next year with Leicestershire our final victims and Surrey's second team that will move down in to the regional divisions. A cracking season with a few highlights such as 100% record for Sarah Walker and Joel Gayle, 14 out of a possible 17 wins for both Caroline Westley and Ging and a coming of age of our county champion Ben Barber.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Eric Richardson for his support throughout the season and to all the players for their efforts. So it's back to the big time for Essex where we belong as champions of division 1 and if we can keep the team together we have a great chance of a strong performance next year.

First Team Captain

Andy Frye